

Editor Comment

Reply to Dr. Allanson and Co-Authors Regarding Clinical Illustrations in the *American Journal of Medical Genetics*

Our initial reaction had been that this letter overstates the obvious. We agree, of course, that illustrations are crucial. We also think, on the whole, that the *American Journal of Medical Genetics* is over- rather than underillustrated. We take our esteemed colleagues' comments seriously, and based on recent and long-time experience, we list the several reasons that photographs might not appear as often as one might wish:

1. Parents refused, as is their right, to have the patient photographed for reasons of embarrassment/privacy or religious beliefs as in some Hutterites, many Old Order Amish/Mennonites, or orthodox Jews and many Muslims and Asiatic people.
2. Parents allowed photography of the patient but refused permission for publication, which is also their right.
3. Parents gave permission to photograph and for pictures to be reviewed by referees to verify diagnosis, but refused their publication.
4. There was no opportunity to photograph before death, or at autopsy.
5. The photographs were useless because the infant's face was covered with tubes and tape, or the technical quality was not suitable for publication; in rare cases, these can be converted into line drawings for publication.
6. Photographs or slides were lost or disappeared from the chart in the mysterious manner inherent to university hospitals and similar teaching institutions (Peter's principle or Murphy's law).
7. Both reviewers felt strongly about excluding what they consider unnecessary illustration. In such cases we recommend that the authors comply with the wishes of the reviewers; however, when in doubt, or when only one of the reviewers raises the issue, we usually do *not* exclude the illustrations. Space is an issue (the 1996 issues were filled before the middle of the year); however, the reason for nonillustration is almost *never* because of lack of space. We encourage publication of *all* data needed to justify or support conclusions—but not to excess whether in words, tables, references, or photographs.

In any event, the ultimate decision whether or not a manuscript should be published, even without patient photographs, rests largely, if not entirely, on the reviewers' opinions and judgments. For instance, if the case is that of a common condition (e.g., Noonan syndrome), or if the authors are known experts in the field and if they report on a new finding affecting internal organs (i.e., hypertrophic cardiomyopathy), we would see no need to publish a photograph of the patient's face. In a different situation, the decision could be just the opposite. Overall, the *American Journal of Medical Genetics* probably is at fault for excessive publication of clinical photographs, certainly not for the opposite.

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of the *American Journal*
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